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The Sun (Baltimore)

August 18, 1996, Sunday, FINAL EDITION

**SECTION:** EDITORIAL, Pg. 3F

**LENGTH:** 741 words

**HEADLINE:** Outward Bound finds the inner self

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**BODY:**

TEN YEARS AGO this summer, Stephanie Rawlings reported for a three-and-a-half week Outward Bound course prepared for anything -- anything, that is, but really roughing it.

Hair dryer, make-up, clothes. You name it, she had packed it. As the instructors surveyed her luggage, weeding out all the items she would learn to live without, she began to learn the difference between frills and necessities.

She did manage to sneak a hair brush past their eagle eyes by hiding it in her clothes.

And for the next few weeks she provided a stream of cynical commentary worthy of a self-described 16-year-old "priss." One of her favorite ploys was to glance at her watch and remind the group of the TV shows they were missing.

But the cynical 16-year-old grew up that summer -- in an experience that her father, Del. Howard P. "Pete" Rawlings, thinks helped forge the determination that last year made Ms. Rawlings the youngest person ever elected to the Baltimore City Council.

True confidence

"She was always outwardly cocky and confident," he says. "But [Outward Bound] moved her from being a person who tries to exhibit confidence to a person who is truly confident."

When she returned to Western High School after her Outward Bound course, her tennis coach found that the priss who wouldn't chase a ball had learned to hustle.

She had learned a lot of other things, as well -- about the outdoors and, most important, about herself.

In the 10 years since that first Baltimore-based Outward Bound experience, hundreds of local young people have learned similar lessons. With Leakin Park as its home base, Baltimore's Parks and People foundation put in place a

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program that is now completing a decade of operation.

For hundreds of teen-agers the experience became a touchstone, something they could look back on to help them summon the strength to meet the challenges of moving from adolescence to adulthood.

#### Expeditionary learning

Outward Bound and other kinds of "expeditionary learning" programs are good at that. The unfamiliar physical challenges of ropes courses, rock climbing, sailing on the Chesapeake or canoeing on the Potomac can seem overwhelming at first. But the experience of sticking to it, working with the group and, finally, succeeding in an exhausting task can give anybody a deep well of confidence.

Dr. David Hornbeck, a former head of the Maryland State Department of Education and now superintendent of the Philadelphia public schools, likes the way Outward Bound instills confidence in young people through its physical challenges and its emphasis on community service.

It's not just their pride in themselves for succeeding in something physically difficult, he says, but also the pride they can take in knowing that other people on their team recognize and depend on their success.

The team effort involved in the Outward Bound experience has spawned a variety of programs designed for team-building in the corporate world as well.

But for teen-agers, Outward Bound can literally shape a life. Ms. Rawlings recalls her cockiness in assuming that walking a couple of miles each morning and afternoon would get her in shape for her expedition.

Imagine her surprise when her instructor announced a "jog" the first day that turned out to be nothing less than an all-out run.

She griped a lot, but at the end of the course she found that she could run 10 miles without stopping. Later on, when she faced tough challenges in school or in life, she would say to herself, "If I can run 10 miles I can do this."

In a world wondering what to do with teen-agers with an attitude, Outward Bound has a clever answer: "A pack a day, frequent paddlings and more exposure to rock groups."

#### Adolescent antidote

But in truth, what better antidote to the defiant cockiness and aching insecurities of adolescence, to its ever-present temptations and equally plentiful good intentions and, especially, to the unquenchable dreams of youth than a backpacking trip through the wilderness, or the bliss of paddling a canoe down a pristine river or the unmatched thrill of scaling a wall of rocks.

Put kids, especially city kids not accustomed to the wilderness, in settings like these, and good things happen. For 10 years, Parks and People has done that, and thousands of Marylanders are better off because it did.

Sara Engram is deputy editorial page editor of The Sun.

Pub Date: 8/18/96

**TYPE:** OP-ED, COMMENTARY

**LOAD-DATE:** August 20, 1996